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Message Text

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ACTION MED-03

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FM AMEMBASSY ANKARA
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UNCLAS ANKARA 8613

E.O. 11652: N/A
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SUBJECT: ANKARA, 1976 - THICKENING SMOG

1. THUS FAR ANKARA HAS HAD A RELATIVELY MILD AUTUMN, WITH RELATIVELY LITTLE RAIN AND EXTENDED PERIODS OF SUNNY, ALMOST WINDLESS, DAYS. IN MOST OTHER WORLD CAPITALS, THIS WOULD BE A SOURCE OF PLEASURE. IN ANKARA, HOWEVER, IT IS A CAUSE OF SERIOUS CONCERN.

2. IT HAS NOT YET BEEN COLD ENOUGH TO REQUIRE APARTMENT HOUSEOWNERS TO RUN THEIR LIGNITE-FIRED BOILERS AT FULL CAPACITY FOR EXTENDED PERIODS. NEVERTHELESS, THE SMOG SEASON STARTED IN LATE SEPTEMBER AND WE HAVE HAD MANY DAYS SINCE THE WITH HIGHER SMOG LEVELS THAN WE HAVE PREVIOUSLY EXPERI-ENCED IN THE COLD DEAD OF WINTER. TRAVELERS APPROACHING ANKARA FROM THE CRISP CLEAR MOUNTAIN AIR ARE STRUCK BY THE HUGE DENSE BLACK MUSHROOM-SHAPED CLOUD OVERHANGING AND ENTIRELY ENGULFING THE NATURAL BOWL IN WHICH THE CITY LIES. ONCE IN THAT CLOUD, VISIBILITY IS SIGNIFICANTLY LIMITED AND BREATHING IS A NOTICEABLY DIFFERENT EXPERIENCE.

3. THE LACK OF WIND IS OBVIOUSLY PART OF THE CAUSE. ANOTHER CAUSUAL FACTOR MUST BE THE CONTINUING CONSTRUCTION OF NEW APARTMENT BUILDINGS WITH NEW LIGNITE-FIRED HEATING AND HOT WATER SYSTEMS. THIS IS PARTICULARLY TRUE OF THE CANKAYA AREA WHICH USED TO BE RELATIVELY SMOG-FREE. BUT NEW APART-MENTS ARE MARCHING UP THE HILLS OF THIS DISTRICT CARRYING THE SMOG LINE UP WITH THEM. NO PART OF ANKARA IS ANY LONGER SAFE FROM SMOG. GIVEN THE HEAVY SMOG WE ARE PRESENTLY
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EXPERIENCING, COMING FROM ONLY PARTIAL HEATING OF BUILDINGS

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IN MILD WEATHER, THE PROSPECTS OF AIR POLLUTION, ONCE THE
ANATOLIAN WINTER REALLY ARRIVES ARE GRIM INDEED.

4. THERE IS LITTLE HOPE THAT THE TURKISH AUTHORITIES WILL
BE ABLE TO AMELIORATE THE SITUATION IN A TIMELY WAY.
TECHNOLOGY, WE ARE TOLD, COULD DO MUCH TO REDUCE THE AMOUNT
OF PARTICULATES AND GASES SPEWED INTO THE CITY'S ATMOSPHERE.
CONVERSAION FROM LIGNITE TO PETROLEUM, COKING LIGNITE AT A
SITE AWAY FROM ANKARA, EVEN SIMPLE WASHING OF LIGNITE BEFORE
IT IS BURNED, HAVE BEEN SUGGESTED BY COMPETENT EXPERTS AS
MEASURES WHICH WOULD SUBSTANTIALLY CONTRIBUTE TO THE REDUCTION
OF AIR POLLUTION. BUT ALL OF THESE WOULD REQUIRE SUCH A
SIGNIFICANT INVESTMENT OF TURKEY'S LIMITED BUDGETARY AND
FOREIGN EXCHANGE RESOURCES THAT IT WOULD BE UNREALISTIC TO
EXPECT A COMPREHENSIVE SET OF GOT-FINANCED ANTI-POLLUTION
MEASURES IN THE NEAR FUTURE.

5. THIS EMBASSY IS THEREFORE FACED WITH A SERIOUS AND
WORSENING PROBLEM WHICH, WE ARE TOLD, CONSTITUTES A SEVERE
HEALTH HAZARD. IN OUR ENDEAVORS TO COPE WITH THIS PROBLEM
AS BEST WE CAN WITH REALISTIC COUNTERMEASURES, WE ARE
HAMPERED BY THE LACK OF MEDICAL ADVICE, BASED ON CAREFUL
EXAMINATION OF THE ANKARA SITUATION AS WELL AS THE APPLICABLE
LITERATURE ON THE EFFECTS OF AIR POLLUTION ON HEALTH. WE
NEED JUDGMENTS, FOR EXAMPLE, ON SUCH QUESTIONS AS HOW SERIOUS
A HEALTH PROBLEM IS ANKARA POLLUTION; SHOULD WE TIGHTEN UP
THE STANDARDS OF MEDICAL CLEARANCES REQUIRED OF PERSONNEL
BEFORE ASSIGNMENT TO THIS POST; ARE BRIEF BUT REGULAR
ABSENCES FROM THE SMOG ZONE BENEFICIAL IN REDUCING THE
HARMFUL EFFECTS OF SMOG (THE DEPARTMENT HAS JUST VOIDED OUR
PROGRAM FOR GETTING EMPLOYEES OUT OF THE SMOG AREA A FEW
HOURS EACH WEDNESDAY AFTERNOON); WOULD THE USE OF SURGICAL
FACE MASKS BE OF ANY REAL BENEFIT? THESE ARE BUT A FEW OF
THE QUESTIONS TO WHICH WE NEED ANSWERS.

6. ACCORDINGLY, WE REQUEST THE MEDICAL DIVISION OF THE
DEPARTMENT TO RECRUIT AS A CONSULTANT A RECOGNIZED SPECIALIST
IN THE AIR POLLUTION FIELD OF INDUSTRIAL MEDICINE. SUCH A
SPECIALIST SHOULD BE SENT PROMPTLY TO ANKARA TO OBSERVE
CONDITIONS, CONSULT WITH LOCAL EXPERTS AND PERHAPS CONDUCT
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DETAILED PHYSICAL EXAMINATIONS ON AN ACROSS-THE-BOARD SAMPLE
OF AMERICAN PERSONNEL AND DEPENDENTS. FROM SUCH AN INVESTI-
GATION COULD COME RECOMMENDATIONS AS TO HOW WE CAN BEST
COPE WITH THE AIR POLLUTION WITH THE PRACTICAL MEANS AT OUR
DISPOSAL.
MACOMBER

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